

The Philosophy of Language

Introduction to the Issue

Martin Hinton

Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote that “All philosophy is a ‘critique of language’” (1974, 4.0031) and certainly, within the analytic tradition, the nature of language, of what meaning is and how it is conveyed, has remained at the centre of philosophical concern since his time. The field is a broad one with many different approaches and priorities. It ranges through epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind and into semantics and philosophy of linguistics, seeking answers to the questions of meaning, reference, and truth. It has been claimed that for analytic philosophers “the philosophy of language is the foundation of all other philosophy because it is only by the analysis of language that we can analyse thought” (Dummett 1978, 441–42), and, despite some suggestions that the subject has run out of road, this issue gives backing to the opinion “that the philosophy of language is an open enterprise and that it is in very good shape indeed” (Stalmaszczyk 2022, 46).

This breadth of research topics and perspectives is reflected both in the papers which make up this special issue and in the presentations at the conference which inspired it. PhiLang 2023 was the eighth edition of the conference on the Philosophy of Language and Linguistics, founded and chaired by Prof. Piotr Stalmaszczyk, and held bi-annually at the University of Lodz. The series and the community which has formed around it have a long tradition of publishing both collected volumes and special issues. These have ranged across the wide open spaces of research into language including books dedicated to names, natural kinds, syntax, pragmatics, and, most recently, conceptual engineering (Stalmaszczyk 2024). There have also

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been many journal issues in both Polish and international titles, including *Informal Logic* and *Topoi*.¹

This current issue does not set out to address one particular question in the philosophy of language, but rather to provide a wide lens snapshot of the current state of the field, ranging from concerns over vagueness, via the nature of concepts to conceptual engineering and cognitive linguistics. In that way, it is intended to illustrate the richness and vitality of current research and provide readers of *Forum Philosophicum* with an overview of work being done across a range of philosophical investigation into aspects of language and its use.

I have already referred to “Analytic” philosophy and a consideration of what that term means, where it came from, and how it relates to modern trends in philosophy of language is a good place to start. The first article in the issue, “The Rise of the Term ‘Analytic Philosophy’ in Britain in the Early 1930s and Its Contemporary Evolution: Conceptual Creativity and Conceptual Engineering” by Artur Kosecki, considers both the evolution of the phrase and the ideas which it was intended to represent. He traces the connections amongst the work of the Cambridge School of Analysis, the Vienna Circle, and the Lviv-Warsaw School, and concludes that the original essence of the term referred to an analytical method, scientific principles and an approach which was anti-historical. Modern analytic philosophy, however, is more focussed on conceptual creativity, as reflected by the contemporary trend for “conceptual engineering,” often motivated by socio-political goals.

A second paper which links earlier philosophers to the conceptual engineering movement and compares their motivations is “Criticizing Language: Dangers, Deficiencies and Conceptual Engineering,” by Martin Hinton. This work examines different ways in which philosophers from Aristotle, through Berkeley and Bentham, and Wittgenstein and Mauthner, to Cappelen and Haslanger, have criticized the language with which they worked, and sometimes suggested ways of improving it. It divides the problems with language into two groups: dangers and deficiencies. Dangers of language are those aspects which lead us into a false understanding, false reasoning, or false valuing. Deficiencies are the shortcomings of language which prevent it from being a fully adequate means of expression, particularly for philosophically meaningful debate. It is concluded that inherent within the conceptual engineering project are criticisms of both types: language is a danger because it can lead to bad social outcomes, and

1. For a full list of publications, see the archive at philang.uni.lodz.pl.

language is deficient because its processes of semantic change do not right those injustices without external and explicit modification.

The difficult issue of “concepts” and their nature is taken up by Fernando Martinez Manrique in his “The Amodality of Language: Abstract Concepts and Core Cognition.” Amodal concepts are not constituted by representations linked to a particular mode of perception and are somewhat controversial. This paper considers the role of language in the debate and discusses two routes to linguistic amodality: via the amodal nature of abstract concepts and through theories of core cognition which posit innate primitive concepts. The author examines these two possibilities and concludes that abstractness is not a conclusive factor against modal-specificity due to the lack of a full account of how sensorimotor representations influence language processing. Amodality through the theory of primitive concepts is more promising, provided that early cognition does feature amodal representations and that the later acquisition of concepts via language is continuous with them.

The following two papers address important and perennial issues in the philosophy of language: language ontology and the problems of names. In her paper “Natural language(s) ontology and linguistic relativity: a deflationary approach,” CARLOTA GARCIA LLORENTE takes a deflationary perspective in presenting how ontological commitment occurs in natural languages. The author relies on the Quinean shift towards a naturalised epistemology combined with strategies for analysing ontologies reflected in natural languages taken from Moltmann. The resulting perspective is of a descriptive metaphysics rather than a revisionist one and is informed by linguistics as well as metaphysical theories. The author suggests that there are implications for the hypothesis of linguistic relativity as the ontological commitments inherent in different languages are likely to affect the worldview of their speakers.

HUGO HEAGREN contributes to the debate on names and vagueness in his paper “Supervaluationism about Vague Names Cannot Account for Statements about Those Names.” In different traditions, names may be vague because the entities they refer to are themselves “fuzzy” and do not have clear boundaries, or because the names simply fail to capture the nature of the objects and only refer vaguely. Supervaluationism is a theory of the second type and is the focus of Heagren’s work. He describes two varieties of Supervaluationism and tests their ability to account for two exemplar sentences with truth conditions dependent on vagueness and concludes that neither is capable of doing so satisfactorily. Since these exhaust the possibilities for Supervaluationist theories, he concludes that no such theory can be correct.

Finally, in “Image-based internet memes as conceptual blends,” ALEXSANDRA MAJDZIŃSKA-KOCZOROWICZ and JULIA OSTANINA-OLSZEWSKA consider the important contemporary phenomenon of internet memes from a Conceptual Blending Theory perspective. Their work applies insights from the influential field of cognitive linguistics to the multimodal communication of internet memes and show how blending theory allows for an understanding of the relationships amongst perceptual modes and the cognitive processes at work in their interpretation. The authors show how the combination of conceptual spaces creates new and powerful meanings for an audience which recognises the cultural knowledge and intertextual information they contain through the interplay of the new and the familiar.

I should like to offer my sincerest thanks to the contributors for their work and dedication, to those scholars who kindly agreed to give their time in reviewing that work, and to all the participants of PhiLang 2023 for their inspiring comments, suggestions, and passion for the philosophy of language.

The issue includes also two papers not related to the philosophy of language. ANNA BUGAJSKA examines the concept of hope in the digital age, analyzing its definitions and connections to notions like utopia and optimism, and exploring whether digital spaces foster or diminish hope, ultimately questioning how hope might evolve in relation to sentient machines and the psychological impact of technological progress. In the other article MARIUSZ TABACZEK argues that while “weak AI” may potentially exhibit stable and reliable dispositions akin to virtues, it is highly improbable for AI to develop properly human virtues rooted in reason and moral understanding, as defined in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. Additionally the “Discussions” section offers four short papers: a reply to Michał Chaberek on monogenism by KENNETH KEMP; report from the debate on phenomenology of art by Maciej Jemioł, review of the Juan Manuel Burgos’s book, “Personalism and Metaphysics,” by TYMOTEUSZ MIETELSKI, and a translation from Latin of Franciscus Bargieł article on Adamus Quirinus Krasnodebski SJ—a Polish Jesuit philosopher from the seventeenth century—by JACEK SURZYN.

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